

*Author's Preface to the Twelfth Edition*¹

However sudden and momentous be the events which have just taken place so swiftly, the author of this book can claim that they have not taken him by surprise. This work was written fifteen years ago with a mind constantly preoccupied by a single thought: the thought of the approaching irresistible and universal spread of democracy throughout the world. On reading it again, one finds on every page a solemn warning that society is changing shape, that mankind lives under changing conditions, and new destinies are impending.

In the introduction it was stated that: "The gradual progress of equality is something fated. The main features of this progress are the following: it is universal and permanent; it is daily passing beyond human control, and every event and every man helps it along. Is it wise to suppose that a movement of society which has been so long in train can be halted by one generation? Does anyone imagine that democracy, which has destroyed the feudal system and vanquished kings, will fall back before the middle classes and the rich? Will it stop now, when it has grown so strong and its adversaries so weak?"

He who wrote these lines, proved prophetic under a monarchy strengthened rather than shaken by the Revolution of July, 1830, need feel no diffidence now in again calling public attention to his work. It is not out of place to add that the circumstances of the moment give this book a topical interest and practical utility which it did not have when it first appeared.

We then had a royal house, which is now abolished. American institutions, which for France under the monarchy were simply a subject of curiosity, ought now to be studied by republican France. It is not force

¹ [This preface was written in 1848 for the next-to-last edition during Tocqueville's lifetime. It was reprinted in the 13th edition of 1850; this edition forms the basis of ours. Apart from Appendix II, which had also been added to the twelfth edition, the author further added his speech on January 27, 1848: our Appendix III. Cf. Tocqueville's letter to Henry Reeve, his first English translator, of November 27, 1851, in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. J. P. Mayer, VI, p. 118.]

alone, but rather good laws, which make a new government secure. After the battle comes the lawgiver. The one destroys; the other builds up. Each has his function. It is not a question now of finding out whether we are to have monarchy or republic in France; but we still want to know whether it is to be an agitated or a tranquil republic, an orderly or a disorderly republic, pacific or warlike, liberal or oppressive, a republic which threatens the sacred rights of property and of the family, or one which recognizes and honors them. It is a fearful problem concerning, not France alone, but the whole civilized world. If we can save ourselves, we shall at the same time save all the nations around us. If we fail, we shall bring them all down with us. According as we establish either democratic liberty or democratic tyranny, the fate of the world will be different. Indeed, one may say that it depends on us whether in the end republics will be established everywhere, or everywhere abolished.

Now this problem, newly posed for us, was solved in America sixty years ago. For sixty years the principle of the sovereignty of the people, which we have introduced but yesterday, has prevailed unchallenged there. It is put in practice in the most direct, unlimited, and absolute way. For sixty years that people who has made it the common fount of all their laws has increased in population, territory, and wealth; and, let it be noted, throughout that period it has been not only the most prosperous but also the most stable of all the peoples in the world. While all the nations of Europe have been ravaged by war or torn by civil strife, the American people alone in the civilized world have remained pacific. Almost the whole of Europe has been convulsed by revolutions; America has not even suffered from riots. There the republic, so far from disturbing them, has preserved all rights. Private property is better guaranteed there than in any other land on earth. Anarchy is as unknown as despotism.

Where else can we find greater cause of hope or more valuable lessons? Let us not turn to America in order slavishly to copy the institutions she has fashioned for herself, but in order that we may better understand what suits us; let us look there for instruction rather than models; let us adopt the principles rather than the details of her laws. The laws of the French republic can be and, in many cases, should be different from those prevailing in the United States. But the principles on which the constitutions of the American states rest, the principles of order, balance of powers, true liberty, and sincere and deep respect for law, are indispensable for all republics; they should be common to them all; and it is safe to forecast that where they are not found the republic will soon have ceased to exist.